

SPORTING LEGENDS: TY COBB

SPORT: BASEBALL

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1905 - 1928

Tyrus Raymond "Ty" Cobb (December 18, 1886 - July 17, 1961), nicknamed "the Georgia Peach", was an American baseball player generally considered to be the greatest player of the "dead ball era" (1900 - 1920).

Cobb is also famous for being a vitriolic racist (even supposedly shunning Babe Ruth for his allegedly black facial characteristics). For many years arguments raged as to whether he or Babe Ruth, diametrically opposite types of players, was the greatest player of all time.

When he retired in 1928 he was the holder of 90 major league records and he received the most votes of the first five players elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame, in 1936. Later in life, Cobb said of himself that "in legend, I am a sadistic, slashing, swashbuckling despot who waged war in the guise of sport."

On August 30, 1905, in his first major league at-bat, Cobb doubled off the New York Highlanders's Jack Chesbro. The rest of the season didn't go as well.

Cobb managed to only bat .240 in 41 games. Cobb showed enough promise as a rookie for the Tigers give him a lucrative (for the time) \$1,500 contract for 1906.

In 1906 he became centerfielder for the Tigers and hit .320 in 97 games. He would never hit below that mark again. In one regular season game Cobb reached first, stole second, third and home.

He would do it again five more times in his career to set the record. The following season the American League Pennant Race came down to the Tigers and another team, this time it was the White Sox.

The Tigers ended up winning it on October 6, 1908, their last game of the year, defeating the White Sox 7-0.



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Ty Cobb possessed incredible agility during his youth.

Cobb again won the batting title, although he "only" hit .324 that year. In their first rematch with the World Series champion Cubs, the Tigers once again lost the series 4-1, but Cobb had a much better postseason, leading the Tiger regulars with a .368 batting average.

Cobb kept dominating the league winning batting titles in every year till 1915. Also in 1915 Cobb set the single season steals record with 96 which stood until Maury Wills broke it in 1962. Cobb's streak of batting titles ended the following year when he finished second with .371 to Tris Speaker's .386.

In 1919, a young pitcher from the Boston Red Sox named Babe Ruth began to come on strong as a home run hitter by shattering the 40-year old home run record by hitting 29 round-trippers. Cobb abhorred Ruth's power game, and when he saw fans becoming enamored with the Babe, he was afraid that the "inside style" of bunting, taking the extra base and hitting the ball to gaps that he had perfected would fall by the wayside.

Cobb finally called it quits from a 22-year career as a Tiger in November 1926. He announced his retirement and headed home to Augusta, Georgia. Shortly thereafter, Tris Speaker also retired as player-manager of the Cleveland team.

The retirement of two great players at the same time sparked some interest, and it turned out that the two were coerced into retirement because of allegations of game-fixing brought about by Dutch Leonard, a former pitcher of Cobb's.

Cobb played regularly in 1927 for a young and talented team that finished second to one of the greatest teams of all time, the 1927 Yankees, which won 110 games. He returned to Detroit to quite a welcome on May 11, 1927.

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Ty Cobb was one of baseball's first left-hand big-hitters.

Cobb doubled in his first at bat, to the cheers of Tiger fans. On July 18, 1927, Cobb became the first player to get 4,000 career hits when he doubled off former teammate Sam Gibson of the Detroit Tigers at Navin Field.

Cobb returned again in 1928, for no real reason other than he had nothing else to do with his life. He played less frequently due to his age and the blossoming abilities of the young A's, who were again in a pennant race with the Yankees. It was against those Yankees in September that Cobb had his last at bat, a weak pop-up behind third base.

He then announced his retirement, effective at the end of the season. Ironically, had he stuck with the A's in some capacity for one more year, he might have finally got his elusive World Series ring. But it was not to be.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Ty Cobb is remembered by many for his legendary baseball career and incredible business achievements.

An extremely rich and successful man he may have been, yet almost everyone who ever knew him - found him to be arrogant, short-tempered and bigoted.

This is not the kind of sporting legend I usually write about

The fact that no-one from his baseball days attended his funeral, speaks volumes about the way he conducted himself during his career.

His shrewd business investments merely masked over a deep, introspective burning desire to be liked and respected. He just antagonised people for far too long, that's all.

He was an incredible baseball player, no-one could ever question that. In his youth, his athleticism was superb and possessed all the attributes for baseball greatness.

It is for these qualities that Ty Cobb should be remembered as a sporting legend, and not for his infamous personality defects. But that is easier said than done, when you consider some of his infamous behavioural outbursts



Ty Cobb was certainly one of baseball's most colourful characters, although one has to wonder somewhat about his controversial code of ethics.